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Press Release

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USDA Seeks Applications to Finance Rural Broadband in Remote Areas

WASHINGTON, June 11, 2013 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that applications are being accepted for grants to finance broadband deployment in remote, rural areas. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) remains focused on carrying out its mission, despite a time of significant budget uncertainty. Today's announcement is one part of the Department's efforts to strengthen the rural economy.

"The Obama Administration believes that reliable infrastructure is critical to rural economic opportunity. Broadband service expands educational, medical and health services for rural residents," Vilsack said. "Expanded broadband service also is important because it supports employment opportunities and makes income growth possible in rural areas."

Through this notice, USDA Rural Development may award up to \$21 million in grants through the Community Connect Grant program. It serves rural communities where broadband service is not available, but where it can make a tremendous difference in the quality of life for citizens.

For example, last year USDA provided a grant to the isolated Alaska Native Community of Saint Paul. Located in Alaska's Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, the town of about 500 is installing a modern system, and the Native-owned firm that will operate it estimates that in the next five years Internet access will result in saving or creating an estimated additional 44 full time jobs including the five existing jobs on the island. The project will also support 23 construction and clerical jobs.

Complementing today's funding opportunity, USDA recently announced new rules to better target Community Connect broadband grants to areas where they are needed the most. To view the rules, go to: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-05-03/pdf/2013-10502.pdf>.

Since its inception, the Community Connect program has funded 229 projects with USDA investments of \$122 million. In 2012, USDA assistance led to improved broadband service nationwide for nearly 65,000 rural households, businesses and community institutions – such as libraries, schools and first responders.

For more information, see page 34979 of the June 11, 2013 Federal Register, or visit <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-06-11/pdf/2013-13827.pdf>. The deadline for submitting applications is July 11.

President Obama's plan for rural America has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the President's leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America's economy, small towns and rural communities. USDA's investments in rural communities support the rural way of life that stands as the backbone of our American values. President Obama and Agriculture Secretary Vilsack are committed to a smarter use of Federal resources to foster sustainable economic prosperity and ensure the government is a strong partner for businesses, entrepreneurs and working families in rural communities.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, has a portfolio of programs designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America.

USDA has made a concerted effort to deliver results for the American people, even as USDA implements sequestration – the across-the-board budget reductions mandated under terms of the Budget Control Act. USDA has already undertaken historic efforts since 2009 to save more than \$828 million in taxpayer funds through targeted, common-sense budget reductions. These reductions have put USDA in a better position to carry out its mission, while implementing sequester budget reductions in a fair manner that causes as little disruption as possible.

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